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Queries

Edited by A. T. WALKER

[Questions for this department should be addressed to Professor A. T. Walker, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. The editors must be expected to use their discretion in selecting questions to be answered. Questions as to the choice of textbooks can never be answered.]

(a) *What good does scansion do?*

(b) *Is the written scansion of an entire book of Vergil advisable?*

The practice of reading Latin aloud, both prose and poetry, is a great help in learning the language and in appreciating the literature. Only when a pupil can read the Latin text with correct phrasing and with feeling, just as he would read a passage of English, can one feel sure that he is understanding the Latin instead of remembering a translation which he or someone else has worked out. It is particularly important that Vergil be read aloud, because so large a part of his beauty lies in the arrangement of words and in the melody and majesty of his rhythms. One must read Vergil aloud, with understanding and with feeling, if one is to know that he is reading poetry.

If Vergil is to be read aloud, his meter must be read correctly. If you mean by scansion merely the correct division of lines into feet, scansion is an indispensable foundation for what ought to be considered the indispensable practice of metrical reading. But this seems not to be its whole use. It must be employed at the beginning of the course, and must be resorted to at all times, when the lines present difficulties. But the pupil who gets the proper amount of practice in metrical reading will certainly not need to write the scansion of an entire book; and to write the scansion of an entire book without constant practice in metrical reading seems to me deadening and deadly. Better give the class bookkeeping.

How did the Romans perform arithmetical computations in multiplication, division, and the like? To be concrete: How did they divide MCMXLVII by XXXVIII?

[This question was referred to Assistant Professor U. G. Mitchell, of the University of Kansas, whose special field is the History of Mathematics. He gives the following answer and promises a more extended article on the subject at a later time.]

Three ways of performing arithmetical computations were used by the Romans: viz., (1) finger-reckoning, (2) reckoning on the abacus, (3) reckoning by the aid of tables. These methods are briefly described in Cantor's *Vor-*

lesungen ueber Geschichte der Mathematik, Vol. I (2d ed., Teubner, Leipzig, 1894) pp. 490-96. With the aid of the multiplication table as far as 4×4 , multiplication of small amounts could easily be performed on the fingers. Multiplication and division of larger numbers were carried out by the aid of the abacus and required a considerable degree of expertness. They were performed as successive additions and subtractions, respectively, the partial results being noted after each operation on the abacus. The details are too long to be given here, but concrete examples of multiplication and division by means of the abacus, illustrated with drawings in the back of the book, may be found in Friedlein's *Die Zahlrechen und das elementare Rechnen der Griechen und Römer* (Deichert, Erlangen, 1869), pp. 89, 90. Under the emperors, rich patricians are said to have employed a *notarius* to register expenses, a *rationarius* to adjust and settle accounts, and a *tabularius* or *calculator* to perform, with his counters and board, the computations which might be required.